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TRAINING DAYS



The Early Militia in Rutland

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By Dawn D. Hance*

In 1779 the General Assembly passed an act which authorized formation of the Vermont Militia. It called for all able-bodied men to become members and to provide their own arms. Judges, doctors, ministers, school masters, tanners, one miller per grist mill and the disabled were exempt. However, the disabled were required to submit a certificate signed by two physicians. Those with political connections, the educated and the prosperous, were seldom forced to serve. Thus, the rolls totalled only about half of the eligible male population.

Prior to 1818 Training Days were held on the first Tuesday in May and October, but from 1818 to 1832 they were held in June and September. The Review Day was a popular social event and created much excitement. Aging veterans, wearing the traditional sprig of evergreen in their hats, young lads anticipating the day when they could join up, the cavalry parading about on their horses, the light infantry firing their muskets, the artillery booming their cannons all created an impressive spectacle. Sometimes, during the confusion, articles were misplaced. After the September, 1824, brigade muster, held in Rutland, Charles Howland of Pittsford¹ advertised that someone had put a gun and a bayonet in his wagon by mistake. At the same time John Dimmick's dark, snuff-colored great coat with metal buttons and a velvet collar was taken from Abel Page's Tavern² (later the American House on West Street).

About a week before the muster, the corporals of each company were given orders to warn the militiamen to appear at a set time and place. When the companies met in Rutland, they usually congregated at Henry Gould's Tavern (later the Franklin House) and at Issacher Reed's Tavern (near the present Grand Union). No doubt their place of parade was the nearby green, now the park. The men were warned to appear "compleat in arms and equipments as the law directs"³ and were often told to bring extra cartridges of powder.

The first order of business was roll call. As each name was called the corporal escorted the man to the captain who would inspect his arms and equipment. The military drills were often halted for dinner, a necessary trip to the horse sheds, a draught of black jack (a mixture of whiskey and rum), or, as one orderly put it, being "dismissed for refreshment, after refreshing ourselves a little with the comforts of life we turned out and joined the regiment."⁴ Usually the afternoon was taken up by election of officers and military maneuvers. If a man did not attend Training Days, he was subject of a fine of two dollars.

According to law, each man was required to be armed with a musket, a bayonet, an iron ramrod, an extra flint, a small brush for cleaning the pan, a priming wire, a cartridge box, a powder horn and a few spare bullets. Each cavalry member's equipment consisted of a pair of pistols, a sword, a horse, a saddle, a bridle, brass plates, mail pillions, cartridge box and a valise.

Some of these arms were made in Rutland. On July 4, 1799 Rutlanders turned out for a grand celebration complete with military review, parade, prayer and music. Local militia companies in attendance were Captain Smith's Cavalry, Captain Butler's Infantry and Captain Chipman's Artillery. The July 8, 1799 **Rutland Herald** noted that "It ought to be mentioned to the honor of the Manufactory in this town, that Capt. Butler's company were completely armed with excellent new muskets and bayonets manufactured here." In 1798 this gun manufactory erected a shop, later occupied by Captain Brown, on the south side of West Street a little west of the Court Square intersection. Possibly the business operated under the name of Robbins and Company. The muskets sold for \$13.50 each.

In early times before there was a uniform code, the rule was citizen's dress which usually included a swallow-tailed coat and a tall hat. To indicate their rank,

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officers wore sashes, swords, epaulets, and foot-high plumes in their hats. As time progressed, each unit had its own uniform. In 1802 Capt. John Ruggles's company of cavalry paid the following for "furnishing and equipping the musick"⁵ (trumpeter).

Cash paid to Samuel Walker	\$ 2.00
Silk twist and $\frac{3}{4}$ yards Durant	.62
(durance, any durable cloth)	
4 yards Nankeen (buff colored cotton fabric)	2.67
1 dozen buttons and lining	.35
Making vest	1.33
Belt	.50
Horseman's cap	3.00
A pair of holsters	3.00

\$13.47

The First Company of the Second Brigade of the Second Division of Vermont Militia (cavalry) was notified in 1815 that "yellow breast girths"⁶ would hereafter be the uniform of the company. During the 1830s the Rutland Citizens' Corps of Light Infantry wore blue coats and white pantaloons. However, when they were not under inspection, they were allowed to don more practical blue or black pants. In 1826 T.H. Bostwick, a Rutland tailor located over S. & D. Ruggles' Store nearly opposite the bank, made military uniforms.⁷ Miss Cole advertised that she made Rutland Light Infantry coats for \$1.50 at her shop in 1830.⁸

The militia was often called upon to escort elected officials, to take part in military funerals, or to perform duty wherever a little pomp and ceremony was needed. For instance, on October 10, 1804, the First Company of the Second Brigade, a cavalry unit under Capt. Gershom Cheney of Rutland was ordered to Clarendon. Their duty was to escort Governor Isaac Tichenor to Rutland for the opening of the General Assembly. They waited from one p.m. to seven p.m. and still no Governor. So they met at seven the next morning and

Attended the ascorte with the governer and Highsharif ten paces in the rear of sd. Company, sd. Company marched to Esq. S. Smith's house in Rutland halted, opened the Ranks the governer & shariff marched from the rear through the ranks to the front door and dismounted, the Company then closed thair ranks, formed in front of the House and fired a Voley over the Roof of the House, then after taking sum refreshment, marched to the Meeting House, opened the ranks for the asambly to march in, after the asambly marched in, the Company dismounted and took thair places in the broad allay & stood through the exercise then marched out by the last, forward on foot, the asambly moved through the Rank, we then mounted.⁹

Cheney often recalled the difficulties he and his troops had that October getting to and from Clarendon during a terrible snowstorm. According to the Rutland Herald, Rev. Heman Ball gave the discourse from I Chronicles 28.¹⁰ In the afternoon the freemen's votes were counted and Governor Tichenor re-elected. Dr. Ezekiel Porter was chosen a member of the General Assembly from Rutland.

Oftentimes, when a member of the militia died, his fellow soldiers assisted with the military honors. On May 14, 1801, Trowbridge Maynard was elected lieutenant in Capt. Cheney's cavalry company. Just a few months later he died and the company met at Issacher Reed's Tavern on North Main Street. There they "joined in Procession with the Officers of the other companies & citizens to pay the last tribute of respect to remains of our Late Lieutenant Maynard. Marched to the Meeting House [just south of the cemetery on North Main Street] attended Divine services then Marched to the Grave and attended his interment . . ."¹¹ On April 25, 1843, Lovel A. Fitch, a printer, died of bronchitis at the age of 19. He was a member of the Rutland Citizens' Corps, the Fifth Company of Light Infantry of the Fifth Regiment of Vermont Militia. The corps was warned to appear at its armory (near the Baptist Church, then located at the corner of South Main and East Washington Streets) in their dress uniform of blue coats and white pantaloons. They were commanded by Gen. F.W. Hopkins. The Rutland Herald gives the following account:

CONTEMPORARY REENACTMENT OF TRAINING DAYS



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... There was something solemn and imposing in the whole ceremony — the coffin borne upon the muskets of the military bearers — the sorrowful tone of the muffled drum — the slow measured step — the motions of respect from the officers and corps, drawn up in line — the noiseless march, with arms reversed, when borne to the grave, the regular volleys — the whole line "at rest", their heads upon the butts of their reversed musket while the coffin was opened — all together, presented a scene, respectful to their deceased comrade and the few friends who mourned for him, and affecting and appropriate in itself. The excellent and impressive sermon by Rev. Mr. Rockwood, was well adapted to the occasion. The whole conduct and deportment of the corps deserves our commendation.¹²

The militia was at its peak of usefulness during the War of 1812. A few years prior to the war, there were smuggling activities near Vermont's northern border due to embargo. In May 1808, orders were issued to Capt. John Ruggles of the First Company of Cavalry in the Second Brigade to dispatch one lieutenant, one sergeant, one corporal and thirteen privates to be annexed to Maj. Charles K. Williams Third Regiment. The said brigade was ordered to the Office of the Collector of Revenue of the United States at Swanton.¹³ The following men were detached:

Sgt. William Ripley	Pittsford
Corp. Elijah Brown, 3rd	Pittsford
Privates Phineas Kingsley Jr.	Rutland
Henry Strong Jr.	Rutland
Alexander Stirdefont	Pittsford
Solomon Hinds	Pittsford
Zepheniah Keith	Pittsford
Almon Hurlbert	Brandon
Benjamin Read	Rutland
Oliver C. Booge	Pittsford
John B. Child	Brandon
Jeremiah Olmstead	Rutland
George Meacham	Clarendon
Walter Fairfield	Pittsford
George N. Gilbert	Pittsford

The **Rutland Herald** noted that the detachment of 150 militia of the Second Brigade marched from this vicinity last Tuesday to stop the Potash and Lumber Rebellion on Lake Champlain.¹⁴ The next issue states that the baggage wagons sent with the troops to Swanton had returned.¹⁵ Everyone reached there safely with the exception of Mr. Stevens, who was permitted to return home due to illness.

During the War of 1812 Rutland soldiers saw duty on the northern outposts around Lake Champlain. The February 17, 1813, issue of the **Rutland Herald** carried an advertisement for recruits by Samuel Gordon, Captain in the Eleventh Regiment of United States Infantry. A bounty of 40 dollars and 160 acres of bounty land enticed men to enlist for five years. Gordon kept an office at the East Parish, but generally could be found at his quarters near the West Parish Meeting House.

Capt. Seth Finten ordered his cavalry company to meet in Rutland on October 14, 1814, and to proceed to Castleton the next day for muster. A note at the bottom of the page simply says, "In consequence of the invasion of Plattsburgh by Gov. Provost of the British Provinces the orders were made null."¹⁶ Militiamen from all over Rutland County streamed northward for the battle, but many reached there after it was all over.

During the years spanning 1820 to 1840 the militia was considered a farce by many and became an embarrassment for those who served. The Training Days became increasingly rowdy. No doubt this was one reason the Rutland County Temperance Society was formed. The following editorial published in the **Rutland Herald** October 14, 1828, outlines the evils of the militia system:

The Militia — We are glad to perceive that many of the newspapers are coming out boldly, fearlessly, and unequivocally, against the militia system — or rather against military musters. For our own part, we have long been of opinion that they are conducive to no possible good, so far as regards the physical strength and military prowess of our country. This opinion strengthens with every example we witness. We know that the maxim, "in peace prepare for war," is a good one, and the only definite principle which can insure safety to our republic. But this principle gains no possible practical evidence of its utility from our present military code. It applies not to that puerile policy which keeps up a system nominally military, yet absolutely oppressive. We say oppressive, for it bears hardest upon the laboring class of the community, and often calls them from the most urgent business to attend a mere farcical display of their own awkwardness, while their pecuniary affairs are suffering from consequent inattention and neglect. The rich find no difficulty in evading the requisitions of the law, while the poor man, who depends on the labor of his hands for sustenance, must obey them — must be strict to the requirements of the statute, or be mulcted in a fine which perhaps beggars his means to pay. And where, we ask, are the benefits arising from this system? Can any man witness a militia review, and then say that correct discipline forms any material part of the scene? The truth is nine-tenths are disgusted with the business, and do not care a farthing how or in what manner they obey those behests, which, in their pride as freemen, they are accustomed to look upon as both grinding and oppressive. It is the heart that constitutes the soldier. Take a man from the plough, who never participated in or even saw a military exercise — tell him his country is invaded and his liberties at stake — drill him four or five hours — and our word for it, he will prove full as efficient a soldier as one who has been accustomed to go through from year to year the mummery of tactics as taught at our military trainings. There is no object to be attained — no laurels to be won — no enemy to be subdued — no encroachments or insults to be revenged — and no wife and children to be protected, when the vain aping of the war-clarion or the shrill twang of martial music calls our hardy mountain yeomanry to arms, for the wise purpose of teaching that they know not their use, and to despise the silly mockery of discipline and tactics. Those eyes which in war might kindle with a glow of patriotism and proud defiance, are dim and careless; and the arm which in battle might wield the falchion with an almost superhuman strength, is paralysed by having no object for exertion, and falls with nerveless stupidity and unconcern. An apathy, listlessness and carelessness, is always observable at our military exercises, which form of themselves sufficient evidence of the soldier's utter indifference as to his duty.

But waiving these considerations, there are others which form not less positive arguments in opposition to the present military system. The more moral part of community cannot view the scenes of vice and profanity, riot and excess, dissipation and debauchery, which nearly all of our military exhibitions conduce to, without feeling that latent presentment of coming evil to the country, which all tolerated vicious and immoral examples have a tendency to create . . . Are examples wanted? Let the incredulous visit, for instance, a regimental review; let them watch the carousels that succeed; let them look at the poisoned bowl as it yields its contents to the already burning throat, and the fumes distil into the giddy brain; following up the picture, let them plod their way to the recess of the gambler, and feast their eyes, if they can, on his iniquities; — or to the scene of the riot, where violence holds its beastly and brutal sway. It is a contemplation too sickening, too disgusting. Let others dwell upon such scenes with complacency — let them yield to the behests of an idle enthusiasm, and sing hosannahs to our *glorious militia system*! But we cannot, will not join them.

Since the morale was low and the militia law needed reorganization, many young Rutlanders did not enlist.¹⁷ In 1844 John Strong advertised that he had Rutland Citizens' Corps uniforms to sell or to rent and he encouraged the young men to enlist. A letter to the editor printed in the October 19, 1843 edition of the *Rutland Herald* after observing the Brigade Review comments:

The Rutland Citizens' Corps commanded by Gen. F.W. Hopkins would have deserved the most credit of any for beauty or appearance had they turned out as they should. Did we belong to such a company and should lack the spirit to turn out on every occasion, and permit the least excuse to keep us back, and disregard the reputation of the company as some of its members do, we would take off that handsome uniform very quick, or fit to be. We wonder that every young man of any spirit in the town is not a member of it. Those who were upon the ground looked like a little Spartan Band, and won praise of all for their promptness in executing commands, and the beauty of their evolutions. We admired the manner in which they paraded. At the first signal each section turned out before its tent, the roll was called, and it was inspected by its officer. At the second signal each section was separately marched upon the parade and in its order, when they went through the dress parade, which was very imposing. This was the only company that turned out at *reveille*, and the only one rightly formed for inspection at the review . . .

This corps also had a brass band which performed at many events in Rutland and surrounding towns.

In the 1830s politicians were weighing the merits of a standing army. For this reason and the injustice of the militia system, the Vermont Legislature voted on October 30, 1844, to repeal every act of the militia.

- 1 *Rutland Herald* October 12, 1824
- 2 *Ibid.*, November 2, 1824
- 3 *Orderly Book of the First Company, Second Brigade, Second Division of Vermont Militia*
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Rutland Herald* July 4, 1826
- 8 *Ibid.*, June 29, 1830
- 9 *Orderly Book of the First Company, Second Brigade, Second Division of Vermont Militia*
- 10 *Rutland Herald* October 13, 1804
- 11 *Orderly Book of the First Company, Second Brigade, Second Division of Vermont Militia*
- 12 *Rutland Herald* May 2, 1843
- 13 *Orderly Book of the First Company, Second Brigade, Second Division of Vermont Militia*
- 14 *Rutland Herald* June 4, 1808
- 15 *Ibid.*, June 11, 1808
- 16 *Orderly Book of the First Company, Second Brigade, Second Division of Vermont Militia*
- 17 *Rutland Herald* May 30, 1844

BUCKMANS
TAVERN



Fourth Of July Celebrations

By Dawn D. Hance

Early Vermonters observed very few holidays. For those dependent upon the land there was little time for rejoicing. However, each Fourth of July was set aside to observe this nation's independence. Many veterans, who had sacrificed for this freedom, hung up their scythes, squeezed into old uniforms, tucked a sprig of evergreen in their hats and headed for the nearest festivities. It was a day to celebrate, to feast, to view parades, to listen to roaring cannons, oratory and music, and to toast (perhaps a few times too many) the country's well-being.

At least one such celebration ended in tragedy. A gravestone in the North Main Street Cemetery reads, "In memory of Wm. T. Hall, who was instantly killed by the bursting of a cannon on July 4, 1803 in the 32nd year of his age." The main celebration in Rutland County was held at Castleton that year, and many Rutlanders were attending the festivities. The July 9, 1803, *Rutland Herald* carried the following account:

In this village the citizens meaning to attend with their neighbors in the adjacent towns, did not appoint any committees of arrangement, or make any previous preparation for the celebration; but mostly attended at Castleton. A number of people, however, convened at the Court House, a well adapted Oration was delivered by Capt. Samuel Walker, and the day was spent in such exercises and amusements as are customary at such times — But a most unfortunate event took place, which in a moment changed the scenes of joy into those of grief and anguish. At sun-down a cannon was discharged, and the flag struck. The cannon (which shot six or nine pound balls was a remnant from the Revolutionary fort at Pittsford) burst with a violent explosion, and large pieces of 80 and a 100 pounds weight were thrown to the distance of 40 or 50 rods. Mr. WILLIAM T. HALL, a young merchant of this town, was instantly killed, with circumstances peculiarly awful and distressing. His head was blown from his body, scattered and dispersed in a thousand pieces, and the fragments thrown in every direction; a lifeless trunk was all that was to be seen of this enterprising young man. Another person, Mr. GEORGE DOWN, was much wounded in the head and breast, and now lies in dangerous and languishing condition, we are not, however, without hopes of his recovery. Several other persons were wounded, but we believe not dangerously.

Mr. HALL has left a distressed widow and two young children. On Tuesday, his remains were committed to the earth, with every mark of respect; the funeral was attended with a large concourse of people, whose minds appeared to be deeply affected with the melancholy event. In relating or hearing such tragical occurrences the mind is naturally lead to moral and religious reflection. And among other useful instructions this distressing event should teach us amidst all our amusements and diversions on public occasions to regard the advice of an antient hero, and patriot, — "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

No doubt Rutland's most exciting Fourth of July commemoration was held in 1826, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The July 11, 1826, issue of the *Rutland Herald* carried this detailed account:

... The approach of day was announced by the roar of cannon and the ringing of bells; amidst which the national banner was hoisted, exhibiting the proud eagle, the glittering stars, and crimson stripes. These signals soon seemed to operate like magic upon the population of the surrounding country, for many miles. It was remarked by a revolutionary veteran, that the bustle reminded him of an alarm signal fifty years ago.

The soldiers of the revolution, and the citizens flocked to the standard by tens, by hundreds, and almost by thousands, and soon the village exhibited an interesting scene. What added much to the grandeur of the occasion, was the serene, beautiful and clear morn, not a cloud being visible to "o'er-shadow our land", and all nature seemed to welcome the festive day.

At ten o'clock the procession commenced forming, under the direction of Colonels Finney, Pierpoint, and Major Daniels, assisted by Col. Clark, in the following order:

1. Martial and other music.
2. Military Escort — consisting of Capt. Pennock's Cadets, (pupils from the military and classical school in Rutland run by Capt. C. Pennock. Their uniforms were blue coats, three rows of white buttons in front, standing collars, white pantaloons, black hats with white plumes and black cravats') and a number of Volunteers, all in uniform, and exhibiting a fine martial appearance.
3. Citizens generally.
4. Select-men and town authorities.
5. Twenty four young Misses; appropriate emblems of female revolutionary patriotism, tastefully dressed in raiments of white, festooned with flowers.
6. 120 Revolutionary officers and soldiers, with green sprigs on their hats.
7. Committee of Arrangements.
8. Clergy and Chaplains of the day.
9. Orator and reader of the Declaration of Independence.
10. President and Vice Presidents of the day.

After partaking very sumptuously of the rich bounties of our soil, the table was cleared of the fragments and dishes, and again furnished with suitable materials to close the festive day — when the subjoined sentiments were drank, accompanied by the discharges of artillery, and many heavy cheers.

(Following are only some of the toasts drunk on that occasion.)

The heroes of the revolution — Tears for the dead, and inexpressible gratitude for the living.

Revolutionary soldiers — Some on two legs, some on one, and all on their last; may their sons be as successful in supporting their liberties, as their fathers were in obtaining them.

The Navy — sides of oak and hearts of steel.

May our sons be as spirited in defending their liberties as were their fathers in achieving them.

. . . The number of guests which dined at the table of Maj. Page (he ran a tavern, which later became the American House on West Street) was 500 — About 500 more dined at Gould's Hotel and at the Village Coffee House of Mr. Reed (near the Grand Union) — and it was ascertained that not less than twelve hundred persons in the whole partook at the festive tables in this village on that day. It is conjectured that had it not been for the shower four hundred more might have probably been added to this number, if they could have been provided for. The number of people of all descriptions, which assembled in the village was variously estimated, from three to five thousand.

The day closed without the least accident. At evening there was a brilliant display of fire rockets and a ball, which wound up the joyous and happy occasion.¹

Within a few years after the jubilee the patriotic fervor subsided and the few celebrations that were held lacked the excitement of those by-gone days. Several factors contributed to this situation. Since the militia was so unjust and had become a laughingstock, anything military was viewed with disdain. During the 1830s the Rutland County Temperance Society was in full force. For several years its annual meeting was held on July 4, no doubt as a protest against the usually, large amounts of spirits consumed during the celebrations. Also many of the Revolutionary War veterans had passed away and the observances paled without them.

By 1840 most of the Revolutionary War veterans had "passed off the stage" and the ones that were remaining were not able to do much celebrating. Their absence left a void, especially on July 4. Gone were the tales of long-ago battles fought at Concord, Bennington and Saratoga — of memories of the great Washington, Lafayette and Stark — of heroic feats and of severe deprivations of camp life. Rutland has seen many July 4 celebrations since then, but none so impressive as the day 120 jaunty men with sprigs of green in their hats paraded the common in 1826.

1. *Rutland Herald* May 2, 1826

2. *Ibid.*, June 29, 1841

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The Rutland Historical Society was founded in 1969 to preserve, study and disseminate the history of the original Town of Rutland as chartered by New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth in 1761, now comprised of the City of Rutland (1892) and the Towns of Rutland (1761), Proctor (1886) and West Rutland (1886). The Society maintains and operates The Rutland Museum in the historic Bank of Rutland building built in 1825, now owned by the City of Rutland, and The Vermont Farm and Rural Life Museum at the Vermont State Fair. A research library and the historical collections are maintained in the Museums and the historic Nickwackett Fire Station. Gifts or bequests of articles of historical interest or money are welcome at all times and are deductible for income tax purposes.

The Society publishes the Rutland Historical Society Quarterly for the members and presents public historical programs throughout the year at the Rutland Free Library in the Nella Grimm Fox Room. The Annual Meeting of the Society is held on the third Wednesday of October.

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of dues to the Treasurer, Sanborn Partridge, 62 Ormsbee Avenue, Proctor, Vermont 05765. Membership entitles each member to a subscription to four issues each year of the Quarterly, a copy of the Annual Report, the right to vote at business meetings and the benefits of supporting the Museums, monthly programs, library and collections. Dues are \$3.00 a year for regular members and \$5.00 for a family membership; for those wishing to give the Society further support a contributing membership is \$10.00; a sponsor membership is \$25.00; a sustaining membership is \$100.00 (minimum); and a life membership (one payment only) is \$100.00. Members wishing to pay two or more years' dues in advance are encouraged to do so to reduce costs. The expiration date of each membership is listed on the mailing label of the publication. Please send change of address on Postal Service Form 3576 (a postcard available free of charge at your local post office).

Manuscripts are invited; address correspondence to the Editor.

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